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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000159

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SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC MP COLTART: GOZ WEAKENING

REF: REFTEL: HARARE 095

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

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Summary  
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11. (C) In a meeting on February 8 with the Ambassador, MDC MP for Bulawayo South David Coltart said the GOZ was beginning to show signs of crumbling under the strain of economic deterioration. The inner circle of the regime was getting rich but patronage was no longer reaching second tier members, including ZANU-PF MPs. Moreover, lack of funds was hollowing out the regime,s main prop, the security forces. Coltart said now was the time for the U.S. and other donors to increase resources and put more pressure on the regime, a message he intended to deliver in a private visit to Washington the first week of March. Coltart said he was disappointed with both MDC factions and planned to remain &neutral while helping arbitrate an amicable divorce. He conceded that both factions could emerge as viable opposition political parties. End Summary.

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Coltart: Regime Crumbling  
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12. (C) Coltart told the Ambassador that the MDC break up was fueling strains within ZANU-PF as well. With the threat of the MDC reduced, there was less reason for ZANU-PF insiders to bury their differences. In any event, the MDC was not the real threat to ZANU-PF. The real threat was not even the ruling party,s internal divisions. It was their mismanagement of the economy, which was sapping both the regime,s strength and what was left of its popularity. The Ambassador strongly agreed, noting that the economy appeared to be spinning out of control, and said the IMF team had come to much the same conclusion.

13. (C) Coltart said despite the economy,s problems, the regime,s inner core was continuing to get rich. However, the party,s second tier was feeling the effects of skyrocketing inflation and dwindling economic opportunities. MP salaries,, for instance, were only Z\$15 million (less than US\$100 at parallel market exchange rate) and ZANU-PF members in particular were becoming increasingly upset. The GOZ-appointed accountant for parliament, a well-connected official, had confided to Coltart the day before that he could no longer afford school fees and could not make other ends meet.

14. (C) The Ambassador said our impression was that the inner core appeared increasingly preoccupied with stealing as much as possible; the sort of fin-de-regime behavior that seemed to indicate that even they believed the end was near and there was no point sustaining pro-government institutions for the future. Coltart agreed, noting that even the security forces, the major prop of the regime, were being hollowed out due to lack of funds. Their salaries were largely below the poverty line, they had very limited operating budgets, and there were persistent, credible reports that the military could not feed its troops. He concluded that on the surface the regime might appear strong but in fact it was very fragile.

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Press for More Resources and Washington Visit  
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15. (C) Coltart said that given the regime,s weakness, now was the time to increase the pressure. To that end, he informed the Ambassador that he planned to conduct a personal visit to Washington during the first week of March to make the case for a greater USG financial commitment. Coltart said he hoped his senior religious contacts in the U.S. could secure a meeting with President Bush, but conceded that chances were slim. Through other private connections, however, he expected to secure meetings on Capital Hill with, among others, Senators Frist, McCain, and Feingold. He said he did not need Embassy or Department assistance but would of

course be happy to meet with Department officials.

16. (C) With respect to existing funds, Coltart questioned the decision to shift resources from the MDC-aligned Legal Defense Fund (LDF, formerly funded by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives) to the independent civic organization Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). Coltart said ZLHR did great work but lacked the nation-wide network that LDF had built over the years. The Ambassador responded that in the current climate it was in the MDC's own interest that it not have financial ties to the U.S. and other foreign donors. He also suggested that the two groups could work together in the future to capitalize on each other's strengths, and in the process set a positive example for Zimbabwe's fractious civil society.

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MDC Intra-Party Struggle  
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17. (C) Coltart said his disappointment with both factions had led him to adopt a neutral stance. Moreover, though he planned to remain in parliament, he was considering a sabbatical of sorts from party politics. He said the party would have been stronger if it had held together. He was now focused on mediating an amicable divorce, which hinged on the party name, assets, and the fate of MDC MPs (Reftel). Both sides would keep the assets they currently controlled and Coltart said both would likely agree not to challenge the seats of opposing faction MPs. The ownership of the MDC name and logo was the main sticking point. Coltart had pressed Ncube and Sibanda to concede on this issue and to look instead to the long-term building of a new political base. If there was no amicable divorce, both factions were likely to spend years in courts controlled by ZANU-PF.

18. (C) The Ambassador responded that both parts of the MDC might emerge from the split stronger. In particular, the Tsvangirai faction might be energized without the more

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cautious Ncube faction. Coltart conceded that both factions had the capability to emerge as viable parties. Each had strengths and weaknesses. Tsvangirai enjoyed grassroots support but his incompetent and untrustworthy "kitchen cabinet" was a major liability, especially when it came to planning mass action. The Ncube faction lacked popular support but had more political talent on its side, including more than half of the MDC MPs. They would have several years to build a base of support provided they could find an appropriate ethnic Shona to lead them.

19. (C) Coltart said the outcome of the two congresses would determine his ultimate allegiance. If Tsvangirai dumped his kitchen cabinet, Coltart said he might side with this faction. Roy Bennett and Tendai Biti, both Tsvangirai supporters, were strong figures that had promised to rid their faction of the kitchen cabinet. If they were successful, it might lay the foundation for reconciliation and would certainly make their faction a more effective party. If the kitchen cabinet remained, Coltart said he would likely join the Ncube faction, provided Gift Chimankire did not emerge as the faction's leader. Coltart said he favored Midlands MP Blessing Chebundo, who he said would be aggressive in confronting the Mugabe regime. (N.B. The same day Chebundo was named chief parliamentary whip for the Ncube faction.)

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Comment  
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110. (C) Coltart's views of the regime's increasing fragility echo those of many other local analysts. In particular, his inside look at the unhappiness of ZANU-PF MPs and other parliamentary figures further confirms that the regime's patronage resources are both drying up and being hoarded by those at the very top. While Coltart may have a vested interest which colors his views, his analysis of accelerating regime decay - fueled by the ongoing economic meltdown and ZANU-PF internal succession maneuvering - is consistent with the growing evidence of a regime under ever increasing strains.

DELL